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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 18th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. TEIRLINCK (Belgium)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 113: HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (continued) (A/C.5/48/37 and Add.1 and A/C.5/48/45; A/49/176 and Add.1, A/49/219 and Add.1, A/49/406, A/49/445, A/49/527 and A/49/587; A/C.5/49/5, A/C.5/49/6 and Corr.1 and Add.1, A/C.5/49/13 and A/C.5/49/14)

1. Mr. CHUINKAM (Cameroon) said his delegation believed that the Organization needed a qualified and motivated staff. In that connection, he expressed full support for the statement adopted by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) at its second regular session in 1994 (A/C.5/49/10); a good personnel policy required a clear and consistent promotion scheme, as well as appropriate financial incentives. The lack of a clearly defined strategy of career opportunities had in the past impaired the ability of the United Nations to find qualified and experienced staff. His delegation therefore welcomed the Secretary-General's intention to conduct a pro-active advertising and recruitment campaign (A/C.5/49/5, para. 33). The principles set out in Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter must, however, be respected when personnel contractors were used as a means of recruitment.

2. There was merit in the Secretary-General's proposal regarding the decentralization of human resources management based on appropriate delegation of authority to programme managers throughout the system. His delegation believed that staff members who were unproductive should not be retained. It supported linking staff mobility to promotion and career growth, and welcomed the establishment of a new performance appraisal system based on relating individual staff performance to overall work unit plans. With regard to training, his delegation felt that the knowledge and skills possessed by staff on their entry into the United Nations must be continually developed through a well-planned and systematic training programme available to all staff members.

3. His delegation also attached great importance to gender balance in staffing. He doubted whether the percentage targets could be met by the 1995 deadline at the present pace of recruitment, but acknowledged that some responsibility for the slow rate of progress lay with Member States. He welcomed the Secretary-General's proposals aimed at accelerating the attainment of the targets set in 1992.

4. His delegation was concerned that some Member States were not honouring their obligations to respect the privileges and immunities of United Nations personnel, and that the trend might even continue in the context of the new information-gathering duties given to the staff in the context of preventive diplomacy. His delegation regarded the involvement of the staff in the internal system of justice as a positive sign of transparency in staff-management relations, and welcomed the Secretary-General's announced intention to implement the proposed changes in the management of human resources in the Organization on a tentative basis and to report thereon to Member States. He urged Member States to provide the Secretary-General with the necessary resources to implement the proposals.

5. Mr. COHEN (Israel), responding to the concerns expressed in the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/49/6) regarding the detention of staff members of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in areas under Israeli administration, said that all those listed in the report had been detained on account of their involvement in actions which violated their function as United Nations officials. He emphasized that the mere fact of being a United Nations staff member did not, in and of itself, provide immunity from the legislation in force. In that connection, he drew attention to Article 100, paragraph 1, of the Charter of the United Nations which required staff members to refrain from any action which might reflect on their position as international officials responsible only to the Organization. The involvement of UNRWA staff members in illegal activities jeopardized the Agency's constructive role in promoting the goals set out in the agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

6. Mr. WILKENS (Sweden), speaking on behalf also of Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway, welcomed the detailed proposal submitted by the Secretary-General for a comprehensive human resource management policy for the global Secretariat. He hoped that it would receive the necessary support and cooperation from management and staff at all levels and from Member States.

7. With regard to recruitment, he stressed the need for a reduction in the lead-time in the filling of vacancies, and the responsibility of Member States to make some of their best men and women available for service with the United Nations. A large, complex organization like the United Nations needed to decentralize, and he was therefore gratified to note the vital role given to decentralization in the strategy. He welcomed the concept of the use of foreign service exchange and the proposal for a new fellowship programme for young professionals from under-represented countries. The Nordic countries agreed with the priorities and plans regarding staff training outlined in document A/49/406, as well as the reforms of the internal system of justice proposed in document A/C.5/49/13. While he saw much merit in the new Performance Appraisal System, he cautioned that it could become unnecessarily time-consuming for both managers and staff. He believed that the system should be accompanied by a set of rewards and sanctions, and that buy-outs or agreed separation packages could serve as a positive element.

8. He welcomed the emphasis on staff mobility, which could revitalize both the Organization and individual staff members and lead to a greater sense of unity of purpose. As an employer, however, the United Nations had an obligation to consider the family situation of its employees and to assist dual careers and the employment of spouses, an area in which the introduction of the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) could make a positive contribution.

9. He noted with concern that the United Nations appeared to be losing its competitiveness with regard to remuneration and conditions of service. It was important that it should be able to attract highly competent and motivated people. Determined efforts should continue to be made to attain the goal of gender balance, especially at the higher levels in the Secretariat. A change of attitude towards women was also required in the Organization's management culture.

10. Not enough had been done to ensure the security and safety of United Nations staff members around the world, and he urged the adoption of the draft Convention dealing with the safety and security of United Nations and associated personnel. He also proposed that the rules relating to compensation for those who had suffered violence or loss of property in connection with their work for the Organization should be reviewed.

11. Finally, he said that, while the proposed new strategy would require an increase in resources, the Organization nevertheless stood to gain from the increased efficiency and savings that would result from its successful implementation.

12. Mr. HALLIDAY (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management), responding to the comments of the Cameroonian representative, said that mobility was highly prized in the Secretariat as a device for both career development and cross-fertilization. With regard to gender balance, he said that, while progress had admittedly been slow, the Secretariat could attain 35 per cent of the targeted level in 1995. He also stressed that the Secretariat saw the use of personnel contractors in the screening, testing and hiring of staff as a means of out-sourcing that made use of networks and resources that were not always available within the Organization itself.

13. In response to the comments made by the Swedish representative on behalf of the Nordic countries, he confirmed that the Secretariat shared their views with regard to recruitment, decentralization and accountability, and said that the new Personnel Appraisal System would provide managers with better tools to ensure accountability. The Secretariat was about to initiate a programme of training in conciliation and negotiation techniques which, together with a system of ombudsman panels to be set up throughout the Secretariat, would enhance the Organization's ability to resolve issues before they became problems requiring the formal machinery of justice.

14. He emphasized that termination for poor performance was not the same as a buy-out; the former, which was not adequately provided for in the current system, required a clear indication of an inability to produce, while the latter was designed to give the Secretary-General the capacity to deal with the situation of senior staff who had been in the Secretariat for too long and were no longer as productive as they needed to be.

15. On the issue of gender balance, he agreed with the Swedish representative's comments regarding the need for a change of attitude in the Secretariat. There should be a greater awareness of the fact that women brought different but equally valuable experiences to the world of collaborative management.

AGENDA ITEM 114: UNITED NATIONS COMMON SYSTEM (A/49/30 and A/49/480; A/C.5/49/7 and A/C.5/49/10)

16. Mr. BEL HADJ AMOR (Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission), introducing the Commission's report (A/49/30), said that the first group of items covered by the report concerned the series of studies on the application of the Noblemaire principle. That subject raised a series of complex and

interrelated issues and it was therefore difficult to progress concurrently on all fronts, since progress in one area hinged on developments in another. The review of the conditions of service of the Professional and higher categories was in abeyance pending a decision by the Commission as to whether the present comparator should continue to be used. He requested the Committee in accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/220, to make an exception to the biennialization rules for the consideration of the Commission's report so that it could submit a comprehensive and technically sound report on the application of the Noblemaire principle to the General Assembly in 1995. In the meantime, substantial progress had been made towards the completion of the review of certain specific elements, namely recruitment and retention difficulties, margin calculation methodology and the inclusion of special pay rates in the margin calculations.

17. The second group of issues related to human resources policy and management. In that connection, he drew the Committee's attention to the set of proposals on performance management, which had been the subject of intensive research and discussion for two years or more. A key element of the package was the establishment of a viable and realistic performance appraisal system; the Commission's recommendations in that connection had been placed in the broader context of performance management. It was gratifying to note that, at the recent session of ACC, the executive heads had collectively reaffirmed their commitment to a strengthened management culture in the organizations.

18. The review of the conditions for the employment of national Professional officers, on which the Commission had held wide-ranging discussions, had resulted in a recommendation for the consideration and adoption by the General Assembly of a revision of the criteria adopted in 1980 for the employment of that category of staff.

19. Under the same heading of human resources policy and management, he drew the attention of the Committee to the issue of appointments of limited duration, on which the Commission's views had been requested in June 1994. The Commission had provisionally agreed that the United Nations might proceed with the pilot scheme and that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) pilot scheme could continue. The Commission took the view that that new approach to conditions of service, which was emerging in response to changing management needs, had important implications for the international civil service as a whole, and it intended to take the matter up in greater detail at its summer session the following year.

20. The next group of issues concerned adjustments to maintain the real value of certain elements of the remuneration package for the Professional and higher categories, namely the base/floor salary scale, the upper limit of the education grant for certain currency areas, and dependency allowances. The recommended adjustments were based on established methodologies and the reviews had been carried out in accordance with agreed review cycles endorsed by the General Assembly. The Commission had also reviewed arrangements for the granting of hazard pay to staff required to work in particularly hazardous conditions and had reaffirmed the arrangement that had been introduced in 1984, subject to a rationalization of the basis for determining the amounts of hazard pay.

21. The Commission had also discussed the methodologies for determining the conditions of service of the General Service and related categories, which had been thoroughly reviewed in 1992 and 1993. At the request of the staff representative bodies, the Commission had agreed to re-examine certain specific technical aspects of the methodologies and would revert to that issue at its next session. In that connection, the Commission had, however, noted that the substance of the questions raised by the staff representatives had already been discussed exhaustively at the time of the review and that a case had not been made that would warrant the suspension of the ongoing round of surveys.

22. The Commission appreciated the importance of that issue for the staff and also for staff/management relations and had agreed to reopen it in a spirit of conciliation. It was aware that, on that matter as on others, its decisions did not always meet the expectations of the interested parties. Referring to the criticism that had been directed towards the Commission, he assured the Committee that, since the Commission acted as an independent and impartial body, it was inevitable that it could not always fully satisfy all expectations. He remained convinced that, with understanding and reason on all sides, the difficulties could be overcome.

23. Mr. HALLIDAY (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) said that the United Nations had participated extensively over the past year in the work of the International Civil Service Commission, whose role in determining the conditions of staff of the organizations of the common system was particularly important at the present time because of the need, in a changing international political climate, for the conditions of service of all staff to keep pace with changes in national administrations, in other international organizations and in the private sector around the world.

24. The Commission's report (A/49/30) presented a cluster of critical issues concerning the application of the Noblemaire principle, which was a crucial concept in the recognition and remuneration of the Professional staff of the common system. At its forty-seventh and forty-eighth sessions, the General Assembly had requested the Commission to study all aspects of the application of the Noblemaire principle so as to bring up to date the way in which the Professional staff were remunerated. In the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) the Secretary-General and the other executive heads had emphasized the problems they faced in attracting and retaining the best staff. The Commission's delay in responding to the repeated requests of the General Assembly was therefore unfortunate and undermined the credibility of the current system. ACC had indicated its concerns in that regard in document A/C.5/49/10, in which, inter alia, it urged the General Assembly to request the Commission to finalize the studies that had been requested.

25. At the same time, he was pleased to note that the Commission had made some positive recommendations, one of which related to an increase in the base/floor salary scale through the consolidation of an equivalent amount of post adjustment. That would maintain the established relationship with the salary levels in the United States federal civil service.

26. During the past year, the representatives of the staff organizations had indicated their disquiet with the current functioning of the Commission, particularly in connection with the revised salary survey methodology for the General Service and related categories. Unfortunately, the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) had decided to suspend its participation in the work of the Commission. It was important that the methodology adopted by the Commission for application to the organizations of the common system should enjoy the support of the staff and he hoped that FICSA and the Commission would reach an agreement whereby dialogue could be resumed.

27. Among the issues applicable to both Professional and General Service staff, the Commission had made recommendations, which the United Nations strongly supported, concerning the levels of the education grant and hazard pay. The United Nations also strongly supported the initiatives concerning performance management and the appraisal and recognition of performance, as well as the action taken by the Commission in connection with appointments of limited duration.

28. In its resolution 48/224, the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General and the executive heads of the other organizations of the common system to consider a number of issues concerning the decisions of the Administrative Tribunals. The report of the Secretary-General on that matter (A/49/480) contained several proposals to meet the concerns of the Assembly, for example, with regard to the rules of procedure of those Tribunals.

29. In conclusion, he said that the organizations of the common system were concerned about the way the system was working. There had been an impression that the core concerns being expressed by the executive heads were not being addressed with the urgency and understanding that was required. The organizations looked forward to working more closely with the Chairman, members and staff of the Commission. Such collaboration was essential if the organizations were to be effective in fulfilling their mandates in response to the concerns of the Member States.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.